

SAFE AND EQUITABLE Sidewalk Access for All

Summary and Recommendations
February 2021



The team at SnowBuddy – with a generous grant from the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation – interviewed a wide cross section of the community to explore and recommend actionable options for the city of Ann Arbor to conduct winter maintenance of city sidewalks in a safe and professional manner in all neighborhoods.

The strongest consensus is that the public-private service delivery scenario and either a voter-approved millage or a utility funding model form a practical and cost-effective solution for delivering safe and equitable winter sidewalk maintenance. SnowBuddy could play an ongoing role in assuring quality service delivery and sufficient funding.

Winter Sidewalk Snow Removal across Ann Arbor

It is time for the City of Ann Arbor to move from the question of “Should the city be responsible for sidewalk snow removal?” to “How should the city ensure safe and equitable winter sidewalk access for all?”

- The City of Ann Arbor has been discussing how to improve walkability for at least a decade.
- There is a consensus that walkability can and should be improved.
- Keeping sidewalks safe in the winter is recognized as a high priority.
- This is a legal responsibility of the city whether or not it places the burden on property owners.
- There are significant portions of sidewalks that are impassable during much of the winter.
- There is a broad consensus that keeping sidewalks cleared in winter will benefit everyone.
- There is political leadership interested in finding a viable citywide solution.
- SnowBuddy’s model is unlikely to scale citywide given its reliance on volunteers.
- There are reasonable steps forward to achieve safe and equitable winter sidewalk access for all.
- The A2Zero plan goal is that by 2030, 25% of in-city trips are conducted by walking or bicycling thanks to ubiquitous and safe infrastructure.



In preparing these recommendations, SnowBuddy found that members of the community and staff from a wide variety of organizations support safe and equitable winter sidewalk access for all, including the Center for Independent Living, Washtenaw Walking and Biking Coalition, Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, Ann Arbor Public Schools, Huron River Watershed Council, Ann Arbor Housing Commission, and the University of Michigan². Some of the most compelling insight comes from client responses from the Center for Independent Living.

These SnowBuddy recommendations expand on historical work in other states and communities and evaluations of SnowBuddy's approach in providing safe and equitable winter sidewalk clearing in one Ann Arbor neighborhood over the past four years.

SnowBuddy reviewed three governance and service delivery scenarios and five funding models for municipal winter sidewalk maintenance. The public-private service delivery scenario and either a voter-approved millage or utility funding model are practical and cost-effective solutions. In each of these scenarios, SnowBuddy can play an ongoing role in assuring quality service delivery and supportive resources.

The SnowBuddy recommended approach is to implement citywide winter sidewalk maintenance using a public private partnership model described below. This approach takes advantage of city contracting capacity and supports local job creation and efficiencies in the private sector. This approach recommends allocation of funds this next fiscal year to begin these services. In preparation SnowBuddy has mapped the city's sidewalks, breaking them down into specific service zones, and developing draft specifications for the services required in those zones.

Summary: We recommend that a local government institution (e.g., City of Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority) would zone the city and contract with providers to clear sidewalks. Contracts would be run through the city of Ann Arbor procurement process. This scenario requires a citywide funding source. SnowBuddy or some other entity could operate customer service and coordination of contractors.

What we know: SnowBuddy has operated for seven years in the Water Hill neighborhood. With the support of the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, it has taken steps in recent years to increase the professionalism in the operation and financial management of SnowBuddy services, resulting in better standards of care, service specifications, operating procedures, equipment repair, renewal and replacement, and outsourcing of sidewalk obstruction clearing. Private snow-clearing contractors have operated in the city for decades for public agencies like AAATA, AAPS, the DDA, and large commercial properties. Some private contractors do winter sidewalk clearing under a subscription basis in certain Ann Arbor neighborhoods, providing services only to those residents that pay.



It keeps people in their houses and makes them more reliant on cars, both of which make the community more isolated and dangerous.

It makes getting around in my everyday wheelchair very difficult in winter weather if the sidewalks are not maintained.

I am 60 years old, and if I fall, I'm at high risk for injury. Therefore, there were many times last winter that I was unable to leave my house due to the accumulation of ice.

I am blind and often slip on ice. I find it hard to travel using my white cane on chunky ice sidewalks or where snow is piled high at a cross walk.



While I can walk and typically do walk, I have difficulty with balance and dysautonomia, and snowy and icy sidewalks make it really difficult to do safely. Last winter I fell several times, not even walking far, just going to the corner of my street. It's very difficult to get out and take care of my dog. Even if it's not truly icy, the snow compacts into something just as slippery and dangerous when people walk on it and it can be really difficult to judge if it is unsafe just based on visuals.

I have to be careful of where I'm walking and pay attention, looking for ice and snow. I could slip and get an injury due to the fact that I walk with crutches.

I have mobility issues with my right leg, as well as nerve damage so I don't have 100% control of it. If there's ice/snow I couldn't catch myself from falling unable to get out of house at times.

It makes it much more difficult, if not impossible, to go out and go about my day in the community.



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